

Today I urge all of my colleagues to join us. Be brave. Be bold. Take a stand for what is good and necessary. Or if you prefer, please take a seat, roll up your sleeves, and let's go to work. The time for silence is over. It is time to move.

Mr. Speaker, I truly believe that the spirit of history is upon us. We have a mission. We have a moral obligation and a mandate to do what is right. History will not be kind to us if Congress continues to turn a blind eye and a cold shoulder to those crying, begging, and pleading for action.

I ask my colleagues, each and every one of you, to join me in the well. We must pass commonsense legislation to prevent gun violence and mass shootings in our country, and we must act now. History is demanding, the people are demanding that we act, and that we act now—not next week, next month, or next year, but now, before we leave and go home.

FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A further message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Brian Pate, one of his secretaries.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 27 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. DOLD) at noon.

PRAYER

Reverend Dr. Phillip L. Pointer, Sr., Saint Mark Baptist Church, Little Rock, Arkansas, offered the following prayer:

Great Eternal One, we thank You for these Representatives whom you have given the sacred trust of participating in governing this great Nation.

We ask for Your blessing as they begin this session, which will serve to improve the lives of the citizens of this country. Please give them Your wisdom, resolve, and compassion.

May Your Spirit guide every heart, mind, and word so that, by Your power, justice, peace, prosperity, and wholeness are experienced by all who are blessed to live in this land.

Help our Representatives to continue to fully embrace the enormity of this task and to carefully execute their duties with integrity.

Bless their families and loved ones who participate in the sacrifice of governing vicariously.

Encourage them and grant them Your joy during difficult and lonely times.

Let Your loving light emanate from this House today and every day for the sake of Your glory.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House his approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1, rule I, the Journal stands approved.

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to clause 1, rule I, I demand a vote on agreeing to the Speaker's approval of the Journal.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the Speaker's approval of the Journal.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8, rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

The point of no quorum is considered withdrawn.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Will the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. ROTHFUS) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. ROTHFUS led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

WELCOMING REVEREND DR.

PHILLIP L. POINTER, SR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. HILL) is recognized for 1 minute.

There was no objection.

Mr. HILL. Mr. Speaker, I rise to welcome today's guest chaplain and my good friend, Reverend Phillip Pointer, or "Pastor P" as he is known throughout our community.

Realizing his love for preaching the ministry as a teen, Pastor P earned his Doctor of Ministry from United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, and his Master of Divinity with honors from The Samuel Dewitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia.

Having devoted much of his life to the church, Pastor Pointer found his way to Saint Mark Baptist Church in my hometown of Little Rock, Arkansas, in 2012, after 10 years as pastor of St. John Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia.

As a loving husband and father, Pastor P understands the challenge in balancing his responsibility to the church and to his family. At Saint Mark Baptist Church, Pastor P highlights the importance of our youth, with the church, adopting the motto "You. Grow. Here." to advance a safe, loving environment for families and children.

Within 2 years of Pastor P's time as senior pastor of the church, a new youth center was built to give Saint Mark kids a safe environment to learn and play.

Pastor P is the proud husband of his wife, Keya, and he is the loving father of their three children, Gabie, P.J., and Elijah.

I want to thank Pastor Pointer for gracing us with a wonderful opening prayer, and I wish him, his family, and Saint Mark Baptist Church continued success in the Little Rock community.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair will entertain up to 15 further requests for 1-minute speeches on each side of the aisle.

VA REFORMS NECESSARY

(Mr. MCCARTHY asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. MCCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, I heard from veterans in my district years ago—long before I was the majority leader—that they weren't getting the disability payments they deserved. They submitted their claims, but the VA was too backed up. The process was taking months, sometimes years. The appeals process quickly became a never-ending bureaucratic maze.

After a report from the GAO and countless legislative hearings and testimony, today we vote on reforms by Chairman MILLER to ease the backlog that has only gotten worse.

Reforms to the VA are necessary. You can ask any vet who has had to wait or any whistleblower frustrated with the VA's culture. The VA has a long laundry list of changes it must make, but there is a problem. Unless the VA holds that handful of employees accountable who turn a blind eye, show up to work intoxicated, or falsify wait times, the culture won't change.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask: What would you do if you found an employee drunk on the job? Or, what if an employee was caught high on cocaine or found selling heroin in his free time? I think the words, "you're fired," come to mind pretty quickly. But for reasons I cannot even begin to understand, this logic is suspended for government employees.

When you turn a blind eye to unacceptable behavior, that is more than a management issue. Bad employees can make mistakes that threaten people's very lives.

Today, the average time to dismiss somebody from the VA is more than a